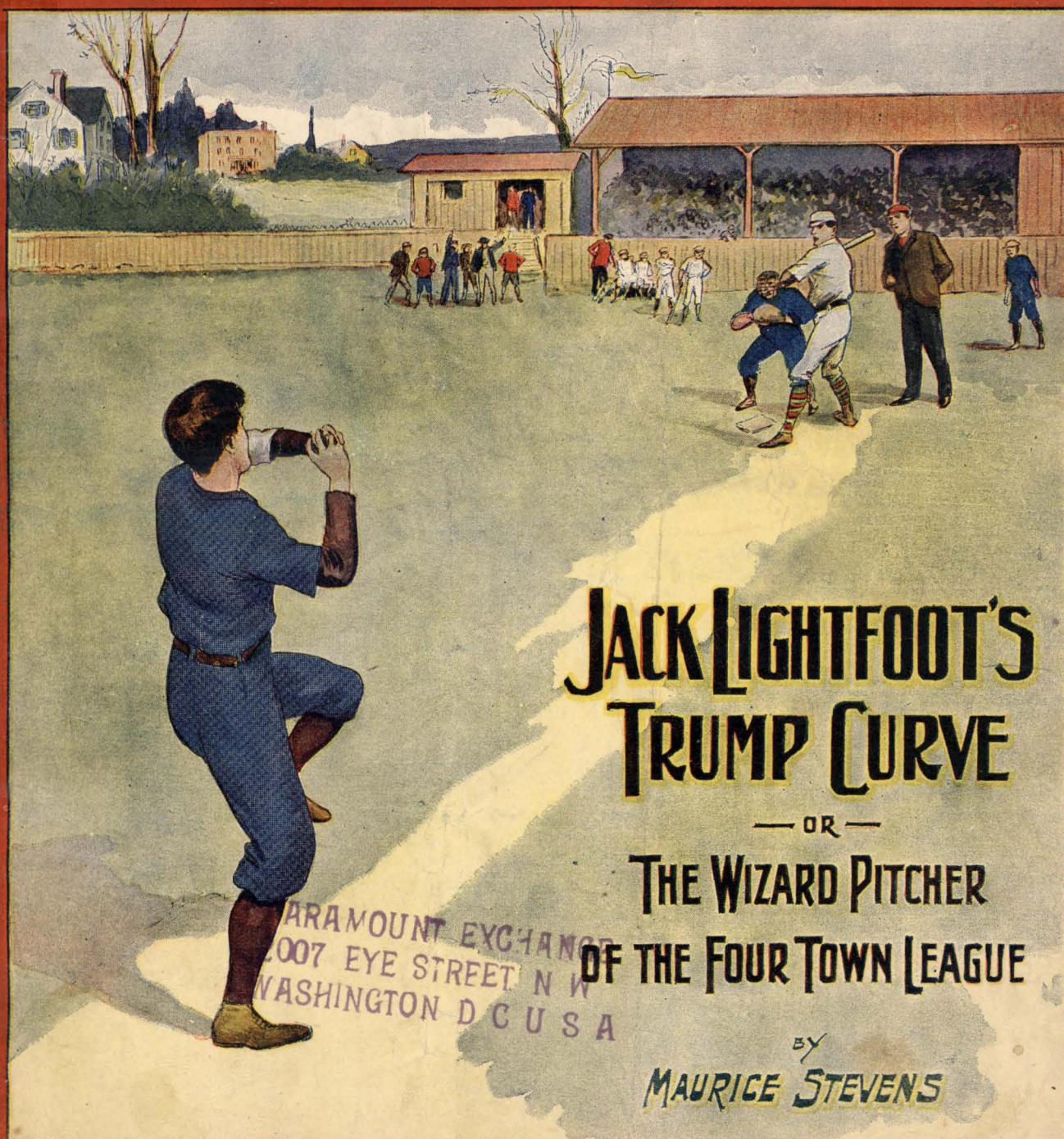


No. 6

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JACK LIGHTFOOT'S TRUMP CURVE

— OR —

THE WIZARD PITCHER OF THE FOUR TOWN LEAGUE

BY
MAURICE STEVENS

ARAMOUNT EXCHANGE
1007 EYE STREET N W
WASHINGTON D C U S A

If the marvelous Casey could but coax Jack to strike out, he knew his game was as good as won; but Lightfoot faced him grimly, now full of confidence.

Publishers' Note. "Teach the American boy how to become an athlete, and lay the foundation for a Constitution greater than that of the United States."—Wise sayings from "Tip Top." There has never been a time when the boys of this great country took so keen an interest in all manly and health-giving sports as they do to-day. As proof of this witness the record-breaking throngs that attend college struggles on the gridiron, as well as athletic and baseball games, and other tests of endurance and skill. In a multitude of other channels this love for the "life strenuous" is making itself manifest, so that, as a nation, we are rapidly forging to the front as seekers of honest sport. Recognizing this "handwriting on the wall," we have concluded that the time has arrived to give this vast army of young enthusiasts a publication devoted exclusively to invigorating out-door life. We feel we are justified in anticipating a warm response from our sturdy American boys, who are sure to revel in the stirring phases of sport and adventure, through which our characters pass from week to week.

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No. 6.

NEW YORK, March 18, 1905.

Price Five Cents.

JACK LIGHTFOOT'S TRUMP CURVE;

OR,

The Wizard Pitcher of the Four-Town League.

PARAMOUNT EXCHANGE
2007 EYE STREET N W
WASHINGTON, D C U S A

By MAURICE STEVENS.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Jack Lightfoot, the best all-round athlete in Cranford or vicinity, a lad clear of eye, clean of speech, and, after he had conquered a few of his faults, possessed of a faculty for *doing things* while others were talking, that by degrees caused him to be looked upon as the natural leader in all the sports Young America delights in—a boy who in learning to conquer himself put the power into his hands to wrest victory from others.

Tom Lightfoot, Jack's cousin, and sometimes his rival; though their striving for the mastery was always of the friendly, generous kind. Tom was called the "Book-Worm" by his fellows, on account of his love for studying such secrets of nature as practical observers have discovered and published; so that he possessed a fund of general knowledge calculated to prove useful when his wandering spirit took him abroad into strange lands.

Ned Skeen, of impulsive, nervous temperament, one of those who followed the newcomer, Birkett, being dazzled by the dash of his manner, and the free way in which he flung money around.

Nat Kimball, an undersized fellow, whose hobby was the study of *jiu-jitsu*, and who had a dread of germs.

Lafe Lampton, a big, hulking chap, with an ever present craving for something to eat. Lafe always had his appetite along, and proved a staunch friend of our hero through thick and thin.

Bob Brewster, a brawny lad, against whom Kimball tried his Jap tricks with poor results.

Saul Messenger, one of Jack's cronies, and called "Fighting Saul" by his mates.

Nicholas Flint, who had a rod in pickle for Jack.

Bat Arnold, Flint's ally in mischief making.

Kennedy, the town constable.

Peleg Brown, an odd character living near the "ole swimmin' hole."

Jerry Mulligan, the jolly owner of a cart and horse.

Ezra Bean, who delights to play the wild man, and scare honest people by appearing as a ghost.

Prof. Sanderson, the autocrat of the Academy, who seemed to have long been Jack's evil genius, and who took pleasure in nursing some grudge against young Lightfoot.

Mr. Snodgrass, an elderly gentleman of means, who took great interest in young Jack.

Wizard Casey, the pitcher of the Tidewater Team.

CHAPTER I.

THE WARNING.

You must wake and call me early,
Call me early, mother, pray!
For I'm to hammer the ball, mother—
Hammer the ball to-day."

Lafe Lampton sang this, as he trundled his lawn mower into the shed, and prepared to hasten to the ball field in the old fair grounds, where the boys were already gathering.

For some time shouts from the ball grounds had reached him.

Yet he had leisurely finished his task of cutting the new grass of the lawn; and now, though he thought he was in a hurry, he sat down on a box and began to munch at an apple, while he "rested."

"These are about all gone," he said, as he looked

at the red-cheeked apple. "I suppose we'll have to order another barrel pretty soon!"

He sighed, and continued to stow away the apple.

Hearing a shout, he looked out from the shed and beheld Ned Skeen sprinting nervously along the street toward the fair grounds.

"Skeen's late, too! But what's the use? He'll run himself out of breath, and when he gets down there he'll be so winded he won't be able to enjoy anything."

Having finished the apple, he put a few things to rights in the shed, shouted to his mother that he was going down to the ball grounds, and shuffled out of the yard, with his hands in his pockets.

"Oh, Jupiter! I don't know whether I want to practice to-day or not! This weather gives me an awful case of spring fever!"

The boys would have told you that Lafe Lampton was forever troubled with an "awful case of spring fever."

Yet Lafe was not so lazy but that there were times when he could wake up in great shape and do stunts that fairly made the other fellows stare.

Only he didn't like to, and it required a more than ordinary interest or incentive to induce him to attempt anything of the kind.

As he drew near the old fair grounds he heard the rattle of wheels, and saw Mr. Snodgrass driving toward the entrance in his buggy.

This was so surprising a thing that Lafe hurried a little, by entering the grounds through a broken section of the fence, and so reached the group at the diamond ahead of Snodgrass.

Jack Lightfoot was doing some practice pitching, and giving batting advice to Saul Messenger, who was handling the bat at that moment.

Jack stopped, with the ball in his hand, and turned toward the buggy, as Snodgrass drew rein.

Old Snodgrass, as the boys called him, was elderly, gaunt and somewhat grizzled, with a keen, dark eye, a severe face, and a beaklike nose.

He had taken a fancy to Jack Lightfoot and had shown his liking for Jack on several occasions considerably to the surprise of the people of Cranford.

It seemed a queer thing to them to have this old

banker and capitalist give so much attention to "boys' sports," as he had done recently, yet Snodgrass had been fond of athletics in his younger days, and it was but that old love cropping out anew.

Snodgrass drove a good horse; the buggy in which he sat was comfortably upholstered, and the body and wheels glittered with new paint and varnish.

"Jack," he said, as the boys all looked at him, "I'd like a word with you!"

Jack Lightfoot threw down his ball and came up to the buggy—a clean-cut, bright-faced, handsome youth, dressed in baseball clothing. His rather fair face flushed, and his gray-blue eyes held a questioning light. He was wondering what Snodgrass could have to say.

The other boys, members of the high-school nine and substitutes, stood back, consumed with curiosity, yet not venturing near.

"Jack," said the old man, leaning forward earnestly and anxiously, "tell me just how the boys are getting on with their practice work?"

Jack laughed with good humor.

"First-rate, I think; though some of us might do better."

"You're in shape to play a winning game?"

The old man's eyes snapped with eagerness.

"I ask this, because it's important," he explained.

"I think you must have news of some kind," said Jack.

"Yes, I have. How many crack players have you?"

"Perhaps not any crack players, but some that are pretty good."

"Four or five who could be called first-class players, for high-school boys?"

"I think so."

"Well, then, I'll tell you what brought me down here. The towns of Highland, Tidewater and Mildale have organized nines, selecting their very best material. They've kept the thing quiet, and have already been practicing. Cranford is asked to go in with them in a league—a Four-Town League; the letter came this morning. The first game is to be played right away. That doesn't give us much time, you see; and if we go

into the league, I think the first game will be between Cranford and Tidewater."

This was stirring news.

"I'm afraid we haven't anything that could meet the Tidewater fellows with any hope of success," said Jack, hesitating.

The very idea of pitting his high-school nine against the selected nine of Tidewater filled him with dismay.

"That's what was said to me and that you high-school boys would have no show. And so to-night a nine is to be selected; and that nine is to be taken from Cranford Academy—unless," he leaned forward and lifted a bony forefinger for emphasis—"unless we can steal a march on the fellows who are engineering that scheme!"

Jack caught his breath, with a sense of bewilderment.

"The letter came to Prof. Sanderson," Snodgrass went on. "He has turned it over to Phil Kirtland, the leader of the academy baseball boys. To-night there is to be a meeting at the academy, when the nine will be selected for the Four-Town League."

"If it's all in the hands of the academy, then there is nothing the high-school boys can do," said Jack.

"Yes, there is; it isn't all in the hands of the academy, unless"—again he shook his bony forefinger—"unless we stand back and let them have things their own way! And that's what I'll never consent to! I don't intend to let Prof. Sanderson run things in Cranford, if I can help it."

The motive that moved the old gentleman lay revealed. Snodgrass did not like Sanderson, and had never liked him.

"The Cranford nine should be a representative nine," he went on. "It can't be, if it's taken from one school. The high school must be permitted to have a hand in the organization. Now you begin to see what I mean."

"I think I do."

"You and some members of your nine will go into this new nine?"

Jack's eyes sparkled. It was a momentous moment. For one brief instant the old lack of confidence in himself came back to trouble him; then he put it down with a strong will.

"Yes," he said, with emphasis; "we should be glad to; and if we did, we'd try not to do anything to make the people of Cranford ashamed of us."

"That's the spirit; that's the spirit!" said Snodgrass, again shaking his finger. "Now, I want to speak to the boys; I want this thing to go all over town as soon as possible. Publicity is what we desire now. Sanderson and his academy crowd are trying to keep it dark. They intended to hold a meeting to-night, which afterward they could claim to have been a public meeting, free and open to all; and they meant to choose a nine from the academy. We'll block that game!"

He sat up and beckoned to the other boys, who were only too eager to hasten forward and hear what the old man had to say.

He told them what he had already told Jack, with more elaboration of detail.

"The meeting has already been called to organize the nine," he further explained. "It is to be held in the big room at the academy to-night, at seven sharp. The announced object is to select a nine from the best material in Cranford. That throws it open to all. The thing to do is for you boys to go there and take part in it; but"—he shook his forefinger again—"bear this well in mind; this nine is to represent Cranford, not your high school. And don't try to get any of your friends on that nine, if they're not the very best baseball material you've got. I hope you understand what I mean? I don't want to dictate, but to advise. If Cranford sends a nine against the clubs of these other towns *we want a nine that can win games!*"

He turned his buggy and drove away, thoroughly aroused, and enlisted against Prof. Sanderson in the latter's attempt to "hog" the nine for the academy.

He left the high-school ball players in a state of great excitement; and talk flowed in a stream.

"I hardly thought Kirtland would lend himself to any underhanded trick," said Jack, speaking to Lafe, as they walked home from the grounds together.

"Oh, wouldn't he? That's because you don't know him. That fellow is as proud as Lucifer!"

"Suppose he is! That's no indication that he would do underhanded work."

"He'd stretch a point mighty quick, to get to be cap-

tain of that nine, and its pitcher. His pride makes him want to stand out in the limelight and get all the glory. He will want to control the team, and everything. It's my notion that they'll try to run this meeting in such a way that our fellows will have no chance. He planned it so that none of us would be there to vote against him."

Jack Lightfoot looked steadily at Lafe Lampton.

"Lafe," he said, slowly, "I think you're right."

CHAPTER II.

AT THE ACADEMY.

That was a great gathering of students of the academy and of the high school, in the large recitation room at the academy.

Jack Lightfoot went early, accompanied by Lafe Lampton. Even then he found that some of the other high-school fellows were there ahead of him.

Prof. Sanderson was on hand; and so was Phil Kirtland; and, though early, the academy students were there in force.

Several of the business men and citizens of the town came in, Mr. Snodgrass among them.

Snodgrass was determined to see that the high-school boys had "fair play."

Phil Kirtland was as little pleased with this unwelcome outpouring as was Prof. Sanderson.

Sanderson succeeded well in hiding his chagrin, and though he was as "mad as a hatter," his manners were as smooth as oil.

He even greeted Snodgrass with a cordiality that made the old man grumble almost audibly.

This oily urbanity of manner won friends for Sanderson when he really deserved none, and most of the people of Cranford were fully convinced that he was as fine a man as ever lived.

But old Snodgrass was not fooled by him.

"The scamp!" he grunted to himself. "I know he's thinking that he'd like to hit me in the face!"

Phil Kirtland was not so expert in concealing his feelings. His dark face was flushed, and he could not hide his nervousness.

Yet Kirtland was a good-looking youth; and he was truly well up in athletics and baseball. The chief trou-

ble with him was that he wished all the honors for himself; and, as a consequence, he was jealous, and at times spiteful.

He fairly glared at Jack Lightfoot and Lafe Lampton when he saw them come into the room.

Sharply at the hour appointed Prof. Sanderson called the gathering to order, and then read the letter which he had received.

The letter asked Cranford to select its best baseball material, and send it against the other nines of the towns named; and, if the arrangement could be made, it requested an early game between Cranford and Tidewater.

"I hardly think this last proposition ought to be accepted," said Sanderson, smiling, after he had read the letter to the meeting. "I understand that Tidewater has had a nine for some time; they played last year, and they've had experience in team work that any nine we may select cannot have, for lack of time and practice. But"—he smiled again, showing his white teeth—"if we can send a good nine against them, perhaps the time will not be too short."

When Prof. Sanderson said "good nine," he had in mind a nine made up from the academy.

Jack Lightfoot had an intense, and perfectly justifiable, dislike of this man, who stood there behind his teacher's desk, smiling and talking.

He looked sharply at Sanderson's tall, lean figure; at the high, white, narrow forehead; at the keen, little eyes, set closely together; and at the dark, benevolent side whiskers; and he listened to the oily, flowing words.

"A scoundrel, and a grand scoundrel, or I miss my guess!" was the thought of Snodgrass.

"And now, having set forth the object of this meeting," said Sanderson, "I am ready to hear you name some one for chairman and secretary; after which you can proceed with the business that may come before you."

The professor could hardly crowd down the uneasiness which struggled in his heart; for he saw Snodgrass watching him, and he knew that by the old man he was thoroughly disliked.

One of the academy boys immediately jumped to his

feet and put Brodie Strawn in nomination for chairman.

Brodie was instantly elected by acclamation; and in the same way Ralph Sanders, also of the academy, was chosen as secretary.

Brodie came forward, and was greeted with cheers.

He was a heavy-faced youth of dark complexion and eyes, and was, with the exception of Phil Kirtland, about the swellest and nattiest dresser in the town of Cranford.

With a smile of gratification Prof. Sanderson turned to the blackboard behind him, and wrote on it the names of the chairman and the secretary.

In another place he wrote the words, CRANFORD NINE, leaving a space below for the names.

Even this was greeted with applause by the hilarious youngsters.

Brodie now stood up on his sturdy legs, pushed a mop of heavy hair back out of his dark eyes, and proclaimed the fact that suggestions were in order for members of this new nine.

"Phil Kirtland!" one of the academy boys shouted.

Prof. Sanderson wrote, "Phil Kirtland," on the board, in his neat, erect handwriting.

"Brodie Strawn!" said another academy boy.

Brodie's name went down on the board.

"Where do we come in?" asked Lafe uneasily, poking Jack with his elbow, as they sat together in one of the double seats.

"We'll see later; perhaps we're not to come in!"

"Then there will be a fight!" Lafe growled.

"Tom Lightfoot!" shouted another academy boy.

The professor wrote the name of "Thomas Lightfoot."

"That's good," said Jack; "Tom is all right!"

So it went on, until more than nine names of academy boys had been suggested.

"Wilson Crane!" an academy boy shouted.

Wilson was one of the academy students.

Phil Kirtland rose to his feet. He and others, with the help of Sanderson, had made up a "slate" of names for the nine, but Wilson's name was not on that "slate."

"We've enough material now," he objected.

Wilson thrust his long neck and long nose up over the head of the boy who sat in front of him, and yelled:

"Well, just to see fair play—where does the high-school crowd come in?"

"I have the floor!" snapped Kirtland, with an angry flush.

Brodie Strawn hammered for order.

"Mr. Kirtland has the floor!" he said, nervously.

Then Jack Lightfoot rose to his feet.

"Sit down; you're out of order!" thundered Brodie Strawn. "Philip Kirtland has the floor."

"Let him say what he wants to, then; after which I claim the privilege of a word."

Kirtland really had nothing to say, more than to re-iterate with many words his declaration that enough names had already been selected, and to demand that they should be voted on.

"I have here a list of names of boys belonging to the high school," said Jack, flourishing a sheet of paper.

He was again called down by Brodie Strawn.

"We haven't voted yet on the names already proposed!" said Brodie, hammering for order, while many voices were heard, all over the room.

Kirtland caught the cue, and instantly moved that the first nine names on the blackboard should stand for the names of the Cranford nine; and another academy boy loudly seconded the motion.

Jack Lightfoot, up to this time, had been patient—too patient; but this was too much.

"I demand the right to say a word!" he shouted, rising again.

"You will take your seat," said Brodie. "I have not yet stated the motion, and it is not before the house."

"State it!" said Jack.

Brodie stated the motion.

"Now, just one word! I have a right to speak, for debate is now in order."

Jack faced around toward the boys who filled the room.

"Just one word!" he cried. "I ask all of you who think the high school is not getting fair play to vote against those nine names—vote against every one of them; and we'll see who is running this thing!"

His voice rang and his gray-blue eyes flashed fire.

"Yes; vote 'em down!" howled Lafe Lampton.

In a whirl of confusion and protest, Brodie Strawn put the motion, for he could do nothing else; a motion by which he hoped the first nine names on the board would be chosen as the names of the members of the new nine.

So great was his astonishment and bewilderment, when the motion was overwhelmingly defeated, that he could hardly speak. Many of the academy boys, who did not believe in high-handed measures of this sort, had voted on the side of the high school.

Brodie sat down, trembling, without even announcing the result. His face was deathly pale.

Kirtland sprang to his feet, his dark face also pale.

"I demand that the vote shall be counted!" he cried, in a shaking voice. "No one knows who voted."

Brodie, glad to grasp at a straw, put the motion again; asking all to stand; first those in favor of the motion, and after that those who opposed it, so that they could be counted.

This was done.

All of the academy boys, brought to book in this manner, now voted on the academy side of the question, with two exceptions—Wilson Crane and Tom Lightfoot; and through their votes the motion was again lost.

So great was now the pitch of excitement in the room that Brodie Strawn seemed about to lose all control of the meeting.

Sanderson was chagrined, yet smiling; Phil Kirtland was furious and dismayed, and the color of his face had changed to an angry red.

CHAPTER III.

JACK LIGHTFOOT'S VICTORY.

With the meeting seething in a tumult, and Brodie Strawn hammering vainly for order, Jack Lightfoot rose to his feet.

The room was lighted by wall lamps and by chandeliers holding lamps, and the light fell full upon his face.

He was pale, yet collected.

He looked round the room, at the friends who were now bellowing his name; and in that glance saw everything, from the glittering chandeliers and lamps, and the blackboards, to Prof. Sanderson, standing behind Brodie Strawn, and Brodie hammering and yelling for order.

Jack held up the paper which he had already shown.

As he lifted it on high his friends stilled their clamor.

Kirtland and his friends continued their noisy demonstrations, this time for the purpose of "shutting him off."

"Friends, a few words!"

Jack Lightfoot's voice rang out clear as a trumpet, reaching every part of the room, even in the midst of that din and confusion.

"Take your seat!" Brodie Strawn bellowed at him.

Jack stood still in his place.

"Take your seat!" Brodie yelled.

Jack turned toward him, smiling, still holding up the paper.

"I ask the privilege of saying a few words."

"Take your seat; there is nothing before the house."

Jack still retained his upright position.

"Mr. Chairman, I have risen to make a motion!"

"State it!" snapped Brodie.

The din was dying down. Almost everyone there, with the exception of Brodie, Kirtland and Prof. Sanderson, desired to hear what Jack Lightfoot would say, and they were quieting, that he might be heard.

"I now move you, sir, as this first motion has been defeated, that the academy and the high school each be permitted to hand in a list of names for members of the baseball nine. If my motion meets with a second, I shall have something to say in explanation and defense of it."

He sat down, still smiling.

"I second that motion," said Lafe Lampton, springing to his feet.

Brodie put the motion, because he could do nothing else, though Kirtland and some of his intimates began again to raise a tumult.

As soon as the words were out of Brodie's mouth

Jack Lightfoot was again on his feet, thus claiming the floor.

"Now, Mr. Chairman, with your permission," he bowed toward Brodie, "I will set forth my reasons for making that motion!"

There was a clapping of hands and a roar of applause from the high-school boys and their friends, which Brodie stilled by hammering for order.

"It is plainly unfair," said Jack, speaking to his motion, "that in a mixed meeting like this, where any member of the high school or the academy may come in and vote, that a matter so important should be settled by a majority ballot. I say this, even though the votes in favor of the high-school side of the question have won first blood in this fight; and I say it in the interest of fairness for all concerned, and because my only wish is to have a team made up that can win baseball victories."

A wild cheer swept through the building.

Brodie pounded with his gavel, and Prof. Sander-son thumped the floor with his ebony cane to still the outburst.

"To win baseball victories—that is the thing I want. So, now, in support of my motion, and in order to bring that thing about, I ask that this motion be carried. If it is done, the academy can submit what names it pleases, and the high school will submit names. We will, if the academy students are willing, present nine names; asking the academy to present nine. That will make a full team and provide for an equal number of substitutes. Then the eighteen chosen can meet and select a captain from their number; and that captain should decide who of the eighteen shall constitute the regular nine and who the substitutes; and also assign the men to the positions they are to play. It seems to me this is a fair proposition. And that is all the high school is asking—just a fair, square deal."

He sat down.

Kirtland hopped to his feet and strenuously opposed the motion.

Others of the academy boys opposed it.

Fearing that the vote would go against him, Kirtland now tried to change its meaning by amendments; but these were voted down.

The high-school boys stood together solidly, and Wilson Crane voting with them, they carried their point.

Jack smiled, when Tom Lightfoot voted with Kirtland's crowd, and Lafe whispered something to the effect that he would "like to hammer in Tom Lightfoot's face."

Then the main motion was put, and carried, by the margin of one vote, cast by Wilson Crane, who had been angered by Kirtland, and was taking this method to "get even."

With the motion carried, Jack presented a list of nine names.

One of the names, put on at the last moment as a matter of good generalship, was that of an academy boy, Wilson Crane.

Kirtland sneered at this, but presented his list of nine names.

The eighteen were voted in by acclamation.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was now made by Jack, and was carried with a whoop.

The eighteen boys whose names had been chosen went into another room, for the purpose of selecting a captain.

"Tom," said Lafe, as he passed Jack Lightfoot's cousin, "I didn't think you'd stand for that dirty work and vote with the academy crowd."

Tom's face flushed.

"I am an academy boy," he said, "and, so long as I can, I stand by the academy."

Within the room, Brodie Strawn, who was one of the nine chosen for the academy, called the meeting to order, though he had no right to do so, as he was not chairman of this meeting.

Yet Jack did not object; nor did he object when the secretary chosen was an academy boy, the one who had acted as secretary of the larger meeting.

These he regarded as minor points.

Ned Skeen, one of Jack's nine, bobbed to his feet as soon as Brodie called "order!"

"I now move you that Jack Lightfoot be made captain of the nine!" he shouted, in his thin, nervous voice.

Lafe Lampton rose, hanging lazily in his seat; yet there was a hot gleam in Lafe's bright, blue eyes.

"I second the motion," he said, and dropped back, limply.

Jack arose and turned toward Skeen.

"I shall ask my friend, Ned Skeen, to withdraw his motion, with the consent of his second," he urged, to the surprise of all the high-school boys, who were crazy to have Jack for captain. "In its place, I would suggest that names be put in nomination, and a written ballot be used for the voting. That will be fairer."

Ned withdrew his motion, and Lafe grunted an unwilling assent.

Kirtland's name was proposed; and then Jack's.

No others were put forward.

"How're you going to win out that way?" Lafe growled to Jack. "Their nine men will vote solidly for Kirtland. We've got but nine; and one of them is an academy boy. Even if Crane stays with us, that will make a tie."

"If the nine on their side are against me they would have voted against me, just the same, if Skeen's motion had been put; and I should have been defeated," was Jack's answer. "And it's always better to play fair."

"Yes, that's so," Lafe admitted.

Jack's suggestion was adopted; and there was much whispering among the academy boys, who had grouped together at one side of the room, as the blank ballots were being distributed.

Outside, in the large recitation room, noisy voices could be heard, discussing the result of the meeting just held. Some of those voices showed the heat of anger.

Each boy wrote his own ballot. They were collected in a hat, and were counted by "tellers" appointed for the purpose, one "teller" being a high-school boy and the other from the academy.

Brodie Strawn's face paled again when he heard the vote, given in the voice of the secretary:

"Jack Lightfoot ten votes; Phil Kirtland eight votes!"

The high-school boys stamped the floor and howled, when they heard that.

Then a most-unexpected thing happened.

Tom Lightfoot arose in his seat.

"Fellows," he said, "I suppose I cast the vote that has elected Jack as captain. Now I want to say to you that I didn't do it because he is my cousin. Personally, I should have preferred Phil Kirtland for captain, simply because Kirtland represents the academy where I am a student. I cast that vote for no other reason than that I want to increase our chances, when the nine goes against the nines we shall have to meet. In my opinion, Jack will make the best captain we could have picked, barring none; and while I say this, I at the same time proclaim my warm friendship for, and admiration of, my friend, Philip Kirtland."

"Oh, cut it out!" said Kirtland, contemptuously, very red in the face. "Friendship of that kind isn't worth having."

Tom sat down. He was trembling; yet he felt that, though perhaps he had alienated friends, he had done what he thought best for the good of the nine.

As soon as the crowd waiting outside heard who had been chosen captain, they poured with thumping feet and noisy voices downstairs, into the street.

Then some one was heard to bellow:

"What's the matter with Jack Lightfoot?"

A thunderous cheer rocked the air, as the answer came:

"He's all right!"

CHAPTER IV.

KIRTLAND MAKES AN ENEMY.

Coming out of the little room into the larger one, Phil Kirtland met Wilson Crane face to face.

"That was dirty mean of you!" he said.

Even though matters had gone against him, Kirtland still looked as trim and neat as if he had just stepped from the door of his tailor's; yet his face was flushed, and, in spite of his efforts at self-control, he was chagrined and nervous, and showed it.

That Wilson Crane was so much his opposite in general appearance, was enough of itself to make Phil Kirtland rather despise him.

Kirtland was dashing and handsome, dressed generally like a fop, and on occasion sported a silk hat.

Wilson was negligent in his dress and in his manners; and, in addition, he was extremely homely, with his tall, shambling frame, his long neck, and his little, birdlike head.

His nose was extremely long; and this, with his small, retreating chin, gave to his face the resemblance to that of a bird. Some of the fellows had once called him "Chicken-face," and he had never forgiven it.

He seemed to want to get out of Kirtland's way, as if he feared an encounter, but Kirtland caught him by the lapel of his coat.

"That was worse than dirty mean of you, Wilson; it was treachery!"

The boys were pouring out of the small room; and hearing this they began to group round the two.

"You're not my boss," Wilson retorted. "I've a right to vote as I please."

"If it wasn't for soiling my hands with a low-down traitor like you I'd punch your face!"

Wilson was afraid of Kirtland, but this was too much.

"Try it!" he shouted, angrily.

Kirtland lifted his hand; then let it fall.

"Bah! You haven't any more sense of loyalty and honor than a rat."

"Don't talk about honor!" cried Wilson. "You set up a game to trick the high-school fellows and cheat them out of everything! Then you——"

"Yes, I kicked when your name was proposed for the nine! I did that, and am proud of it. Play ball? You couldn't play marbles!"

His voice was indescribably insulting and contemptuous.

"You think you can abuse me because you believe you're a fighter; but I won't stand everything!" Wilson shouted.

His voice trembled, and sounded as if he were about to cry.

"Just hit me once, if you dare!" he screamed, losing control of himself now. "Talk about honor! You don't know what honor is!"

Kirtland's eyes flashed. He stepped closer to Wilson.

"You puppy!" he said; and slapped his hand smartly against Wilson's face.

Jack Lightfoot stepped forward to interfere.

Before he could do so Wilson flung himself at Kirtland with a yell of rage, hitting out blindly.

One fist struck Kirtland on the cheek.

In return Kirtland now smashed Wilson a heavy blow on the jaw, that rolled him against the nearest seat, from which he tumbled to the floor.

"Here!" cried Jack, interposing. "Don't do that again—don't do it again!"

Kirtland turned contemptuously to the door, while some of the boys began to help Wilson to his feet. Wilson was crying, in wrath and humiliation. He tried to rush toward Kirtland, but the boys held him.

"Lightfoot," said Kirtland, giving Jack a wicked look, "there's your friend; take him, and welcome to him! He played the sneak for you to-night, and you ought to be proud of him."

"I am!" Jack shouted. "And if you touch him again you'll mix right here with me!"

"Bah!" said Kirtland; and he flung himself through the doorway in a fury.

"I'll kill him for that!" Wilson Crane fumed, wild with rage.

The blow dealt by Kirtland had caused him to bite his tongue, and his mouth was bleeding.

He wiped away the blood with his handkerchief, and at the same time wiped away the tears that had streamed down over his face.

Then he broke out with an oath, though he had never been known to swear.

"I'll kill him!" he shouted, swearing furiously now, and waving his hands.

"Don't talk that way, Wilson," Jack urged, taking him by the arm.

The boys began to go downstairs.

"I stood by you, Jack, because I thought it was right," Wilson blubbered.

"And I'll stand by you; but fighting never settles anything in a satisfactory manner. Besides, you can't fight Kirtland. He's a trained fighter, and he'd whip you every time."

He steadied Wilson, as they walked together toward the door.

"Now, brace up," he begged. "Kirtland thinks you can't play ball. I think you can. The way to get even with him is to show him that you can play ball even better than he can."

"But I could never do that!" Wilson faltered.

"I'm not so sure about that. You're pretty quick, you can throw and bat reasonably well, and you can run like a hound. I think I can show you how to become a pretty good ball player."

Wilson brightened.

"Will you?" he cried.

"I'll promise to make the effort. I'll do the best I can for you, and if you develop, I'll make a fight to have you put on the regular nine. But only if you prove you're worthy of the place. That's what you've got to do—become worthy of a place on the nine. And to gain the respect of such fellows as Kirtland, and everyone in fact, show them that whatever you attempt you can do it better than they can. And I'll help you."

It was just the kind of advice that Wilson Crane needed at that time.

Yet, while it gave him a new viewpoint, it did not take the rancor and fire out of his heart.

"This thing ain't settled, until I've whipped Phil Kirtland," he declared, wiping his face again, with his damp and bloody handkerchief; "and that's what I'll do, if I live!"

One thing had certainly happened that night; Jack Lightfoot had made a firm friend, and Phil Kirtland had made an implacable enemy.

And a friend is better than a foe, always.

CHAPTER V.

THE NINE.

Jack Lightfoot began practice without delay with his baseball material, realizing that no time was to be

lost, if they were to be brought up to a proper point of proficiency, so that they would have a good chance of winning games.

As captain of the nine, he insisted on his right to select the positions the men were to fill; yet in all things he welcomed Phil Kirtland's advice.

Kirtland was one of the very best players on the nine. His advice was usually good, and it was also policy for Jack to consult him.

On one point only did he discard it wholly, and that was when he put Wilson Crane on the regular nine, after practice had shown that Wilson would develop into one of the most creditable players Cranford had.

Kirtland opposed this with all his might, but Jack was obdurate.

This was the nine, as it was finally made up:

Jack Lightfoot, Phil Kirtland, Brodie Strawn, Tom Lightfoot, Saul Messenger, Lafe Lampton, Ned Skeen, Jubal Marlin, Wilson Crane.

Those who have followed these stories will see that in many ways this was a very mixed nine.

Jubal Marlin, who had recently become a student in Prof. Sanderson's academy, though Jube preferred to study mischief more than anything else, was far from being a model boy, though perhaps not actually bad.

He was thoughtless and mischievous, and not depraved or evilly disposed; yet he had consorted a great deal with Nick Flint and Bat Arnold. Wilson Crane had done the same.

Kirtland had himself urged that Jube should be put on the nine, after Jube had shown wonderful batting ability, as a left-handed man, and Jube had accepted, with a wide-mouthed grin of approval.

Jack Lightfoot would, perhaps, for merely personal reasons, have preferred Nat Kimball, but Nat was to become one of the substitutes, and so might be called into a game at any time.

As made up, the nine consisted of five boys from

the academy, and four from the high school. The academy boys were Phil Kirtland, Brodie Strawn, Tom Lightfoot, Jubal Marlin and Wilson Crane. The high school boys were Jack Lightfoot, Saul Messenger, Lafe Lampton and Ned Skeen.

In the list of substitutes appeared the names of Connie Lynch, Orson Oxx, Bob Brewster, Arlo Killoyle, Sam Tanner, Ralph Sanders, Ben Henderson and Bat Arnold.

Bat had a mean and wicked disposition, but he could play ball, and good baseball material was what Jack sought for, regardless of his own preferences.

Though Kirtland had been forced to agree to the placing of Wilson Crane on the nine, he was not pleased; yet Wilson was showing that as a batter and runner he had great natural ability, and under the coaching which Jack gave him he was advancing so rapidly that it seemed he would soon be one of the most valuable members of the team.

Notwithstanding this, Kirtland could not let slip any little opportunity which came to him to hurt Wilson's feelings.

In speaking of him in the most commonplace way, he would address him as "Chicken-face," and call him "Horse Doctor," this last because once Wilson, taking some of his father's medicines, had tried to cure a sick horse.

Wilson, playing in the outfield, in practice, let a ball drop out of his fingers.

Kirtland was holding down second base.

When Wilson at length got the ball and threw it to him, Kirtland shouted, so that all could hear him:

"Your father must have vaccinated you for about every disease there is; you don't seem to be able to catch anything!"

Kirtland was particularly nagging and irritating that afternoon, in spite of Jack Lightfoot's protests; and, because of it, Crane was made so angry and nervous that his work was very poor.

"He's trying to rattle me, so that I'll be put out of the nine," he grumbled to Jack.

"You mustn't let him," was Jack's answer.

That night Wilson came to Jack's home, finding him in the shed room with Lafe Lampton.

Wilson opened the door softly, without invitation, poked in his long nose, and followed it with his lank body and long, swinging arms.

"I came over to see you, to talk about something," he observed, as he sat down on the workbench and surveyed both Jack and Lafe. "You heard the things that Kirt slammed at me on the diamond this afternoon?"

Lafe Lampton was nibbling at an apple.

He took another out of his pocket.

"Bite into that," he said, "and you'll forget your sorrows. It's a better cure for trouble than drink."

"No; I don't care for it!" replied Wilson, pushing it back along the bench.

"Don't care for a good apple?" cried Lafe. "Well, you surely are in a bad way!"

"We've been talking about that game we're to play against Tidewater," said Jack.

Wilson thrust his birdlike face toward Jack, who was sitting in a chair close by the bookshelf, with a lamp on the table beside him.

The shed room was, altogether, a cozy and comfortable place, with the workbench, the desk and the books; and the walls were ornamented with snowshoes, guns, fishing tackle, hockey sticks and the like, while in various places, and in the corners, were different kinds of athletic apparatus.

"Lightfoot," said Crane, humping his shoulders together, and looking, more than ever, as he sat there in that fashion, like a big bird, "you've been kind enough to give me a lot of points about pitching, base running, sliding, getting a ball in quick from the infield or the outfield, and things like that. I thank you for that, for it has helped me a lot."

"That's all right," said Jack, easily. "I said I would help you, and I'm trying to. I enjoy it, and you do; and it makes you more valuable as a member of the nine."

"Yet I've done some things against you, at different times, that I'm ashamed of now," Wilson confessed. "I thought it was about the right thing to do, at the time, just because you're of the high school and I'm of the academy."

"I never think of those things," said Jack, charitably.

"No, you don't; or, at least, you never speak of 'em. But that ain't what I came to talk about. What I want to ask is, if you won't show me some other things besides points about playing baseball?"

"What, for instance?"

Wilson slipped from the bench to his feet, thrust his hands into his deep pockets, and shuffled nervously to the end of the room and back, fully justifying, with his hunched-up shoulders and beaklike face, the name he bore—Crane.

"It's this way," he said, stopping before Jack, while his voice trembled and his eyes glittered. "Kirtland's never going to let up on me; I can see it. He's intending to nag at me until I do something desperate, or get thrown out of the nine."

"I'll see that you stay on the nine, if you do first-class work," Jack answered.

"But so long as he rattles me the way he does, I can't do good work! So, what I want to ask you is, if you can't give me a course of training that will put me in shape to whip him!"

Lafe Lampton laughed.

Jack Lightfoot sympathized with Wilson Crane.

Being himself of a sensitive disposition, he had more than once suffered agony from the nagging of older and larger boys.

By and by they had come to find out that it was a

deal safer to let him alone, and he had not been troubled much in that way lately.

Besides, the growing esteem in which he was held was becoming his strongest safeguard against annoyances and petty insults.

"I'll give you a piece of advice, Wilson. The thing for you to do is to play ball so well that when Kirtland tries to make sport of you he will only make himself ridiculous."

Wilson Crane sat down, his face revealing dissatisfaction.

"Nat Kimball is showing me some jiu-jitsu tricks, by which he says I can do up Kirtland, all right, but I'd rather have you teach me in the regular way. You know how you whipped Ben Birkett that time, when he nagged you and slapped your face? I know you could show me how to do up Kirtland, if only you would."

"Wilson," said Jack, "promise me to not let this matter trouble you, and to play ball for all you're worth; then, if Kirtland does continue to annoy you—well, I may try to show you a few points!"

Crane jumped toward him and caught his hand.

"Jack," he cried, "I will, I'll do the best I can. But he won't let me alone. And if he don't——"

"I may take a notion to hammer him myself," said Jack. "He has tried my patience a good deal, and he deserves it."

"It's a shame, the way Kirt treats that fellow," Lafe grumbled, when Wilson went out. "I wouldn't stand it if I was him. If I couldn't do anything else, I'd lay for him some dark night and break his head with a club."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when hurried footsteps were heard in the yard, and a form butted against the door.

Jack threw the door open, and Phil Kirtland staggered into the room, holding up his right arm and clasping it with his left hand.

"I thought that scoundrel turned back here!" he cried, glaring round the room.

"What's the matter?" both Jack and Lafe demanded, in a breath.

"It was that chicken-faced Crane; I saw him come out of here, and I thought he turned back this way. Then a brickbat, or something, came sailing through the air and hit me; and it almost broke my arm."

He dropped, limp and white-faced, into a chair, and held up his arm.

"If," said Jack, "Wilson did that, I'll——"

Jack Lightfoot hurried out of the room, without finishing the sentence.

He called to Wilson, but received no answer. Wilson had evidently gone on up the street.

When Jack re-entered the shed room, he found that Kirtland had stripped off his coat, turned up his shirt sleeves, and was examining his arm, at the same time fuming out his wrath against Wilson Crane.

There was a bruise on the arm, near the elbow.

Jack produced a bottle of arnica, and applied some of it to the arm.

"This will put you all right," he said. "I'm going to find out if Wilson did that."

"I know he did it, and as soon as I meet him I'll hammer him for it. Ow! that hurts!"

He turned to Jack, suddenly, aroused suspicion revealed in his tones.

"You were out there in the yard?"

"When?" said Jack.

"When that brick was thrown at me."

"I was not."

Kirtland looked at Lafe suspiciously.

"I saw three boys out there, and they came from this door, or seemed to. One of the first who came out was Wilson Crane. I got a good look at him. I thought the other two were you and Loaf Lampton."

"I haven't been out of this chair," declared Lafe,

coolly and composedly. "I've been here quiet as a bug in a rug all evening."

Kirtland's dark face flamed. He rolled down his sleeves, and, rising, put on his coat without a word.

"I'm going out to look for Crane," he said, and he departed hurriedly.

"Well, that's the limit!" cried Lafe.

"He suspects us?"

"I know it. From the way he looked, when his face went red as a torch, I know just what he thinks."

"I guess I do, too; but name it."

"Well, you've been fool enough to agree to let him pitch in that first game which we're to play against Tidewater. That's to come Saturday, only two days away now. We fellows of the high school, and Crane, thought you ought to pitch, and you wanted to, yourself."

"Yes," Jack admitted, "I wanted to win that game."

"And you were afraid he couldn't do it."

"I meant to let him show what he could do, he was so crazy for the place. Then, if the Tidewater boys began to bat him too hard, or he fell down in any way, I intended to take him out of the box and go into it myself."

"And, if you did, he'd feel like killing you; he's that kind. He would think you did it to humiliate him."

"I'm captain of the nine; and I've a right to do that, if I want to."

"Yet you let him act as if he was the manager!"

"Partly for the sake of peace," said Jack. "Besides, he is a good player, and a good pitcher."

"What he thinks now is that we tried to injure him, so that he can't play in that game. I saw that as plain as anything as he went out."

Jack Lightfoot had suspected the same thing.

CHAPTER VI.

PHIL KIRTLAND.

One great trouble with Phil Kirtland was that he had too high an opinion of his abilities.

Though he was a good ball player and pitcher, he believed himself much better than he really was, much better than Jack Lightfoot; or anyone else in Cranford.

He was never willing to take a subordinate place, or "play second fiddle," as the boys called it.

He had planned to become captain and pitcher of the nine, and his ambitions had been overturned.

When he could not be captain, he insisted on being pitcher.

Jack would not agree to this, except in a modified way. Kirtland was to pitch when it seemed advisable. At other times, he was to play on second base, when Jack would go into the box.

Though he agreed to it, Jack was not wholly pleased with this arrangement. Experience had shown him that, though Kirtland was a good pitcher, he was likely to lose his head at a critical time and "go up in a balloon."

Yet, "to keep peace," Jack had promised to let Kirtland go into the box at the opening of the game with Tidewater, and to remain there as long as he did good work.

Blinded by jealousy, Kirtland fancied now that he understood Jack Lightfoot thoroughly and comprehended the "trick" he believed Jack had tried to play on him.

He had been on his way to Jack's home, to talk with him about the coming game, the first of the proposed series, and a very important one.

As he came up to the Lightfoot home, he had seen Wilson Crane for a moment in the lamplight that streamed through the window. An instant later he saw two other boys, whom he believed to be Jack and his inseparable friend, Lampton.

All three appeared to melt away into the darkness, for the night was cloudy and black.

Then, from the direction in which he had seen Wilson disappear, a section of brick or stone had been thrown, with aim so true that it struck Kirtland on his right arm, with stinging and almost crippling force.

"I see through the whole thing," he fumed, as he made his way angrily up the street, after he had come out of the shed room. "Jack wanted to do me up, so that I wouldn't be able to pitch in that game. He wants to pitch there himself. He either got Wilson to throw that brick, or he threw it himself."

He set his teeth and clasped his aching arm.

"Holy smoke, it came near breaking my elbow, and if I'm laid up by it I'll know who to thank! Hello, there's Crane now!"

Crane had stopped on a street corner, where he had been talking with some one, but now was alone.

Kirtland stepped up to him.

"Was it you, or one of those other skunks, threw that brick at me?" he demanded, furiously.

Wilson retreated before him.

"I—I don't know what you mean," he stammered, for he was afraid of Kirtland.

The stammering and hesitation convinced Kirtland that Crane knew very well what he meant.

"Take that, to help your memory!" he snarled, and he struck Wilson in the face with his left hand, knocking him up against the lamp-post.

"You're a coward!" said Wilson, in a weak voice, as he clutched the post to keep from falling.

"You're the coward, you booby and sneak!" Kirtland declared.

Then he went on, growing more angry every moment.

Wilson steadied himself on his legs, with one hand still clutching the post.

"You're worse than a coward, Phil Kirtland; you're a dog!" he fumed.

"And if Jack Lightfoot won't show me some tricks that will help me to do you up and get even with you, I will throw something at you from the dark; and when I do, you'll know what hit you!"

When Phil Kirtland came down to the ball grounds the next day for practice, he was as dumb on the matter that rankled in his heart as the proverbial oyster.

"If I make a row with Lightfoot, he will simply go into the box himself, and perhaps lay me off the nine for the game; he's got the power now, and he's mean enough to do it. So I'll just keep mum, until later."

Once Jack was on the point of bringing up the subject and asking for an explanation, but thought better of it, and maintained a discreet silence.

Wilson Crane was there, but he kept well in the outfield; and when at the bat did about as poor work as was possible.

The practice was ragged. The whole nine seemed to be laboring under some malevolent influence.

Jack went home discouraged.

"If we don't do any better than that to-morrow, we're gone up. Those Tidewater fellows will simply whitewash us."

"Take a brace!" said Lafe, optimistically. "They haven't whitewashed us yet, and they're not going to. We'll all pull together, you'll see, when the game is on."

"I don't think Kirtland saw or understood half the signals I gave him this afternoon," Jack grumbled.

"If you'd throw Kirtland out of the nine, you'd do a good thing," Lafe asserted, bluntly. "Just because he isn't captain, he has become a mischief-maker. He makes me sick. He's fool enough to think that one of us threw that brick at him last night. That's why he was so glum and ugly to-day."

Jack knew, as usual, that Lafe Lampton was right.

CHAPTER VII.

"PLAY BALL!"

Jack Lightfoot was forced to fight hard to keep from being overcome by his old enemy, as he came down to the ball grounds on the afternoon set for the big game with Tidewater.

He was undeniably blue and discouraged.

As usual, his discouragement and lack of confidence had taken a new form.

Though the feeling was inward and largely personal, he thought his despondency and lack of confidence was due solely to the condition of his nine.

He had worked for harmony, but they were anything but harmonious.

There had been trouble from the first.

"I oughtn't to have gone into the thing," he said to himself. "The high school and the academy can no more mix than oil and water; and when you try to make a fighting team out of the two, you're sure to fail. They won't pull together. Kirtland has made trouble from the start, simply because he was defeated for the place of captain and couldn't carry out his other plans. And Brodie Strawn is backing him in everything. I ought to have kept out of it; I ought to have let them run the thing to suit themselves. Then Cranford would have been beaten out of sight, and——"

That suggestion checked the torrent of his thoughts.

He was proud of Cranford.

Could he have stood quietly by, satisfied for Cranford to go against those other nines with a team of inferior players?

He knew he could have done nothing of the kind.

"Cheer up," said Lampton, as they met; "the worst is yet to come!"

"For Heaven's sake! don't spring that on me, Lafe! If anything worse comes, I shall run."

"If you did, you wouldn't be the Jack Lightfoot I've known."

Lafe was munching peanuts.

"The apples are about played out," he said, in explanation.

"You'd play ball better if you didn't eat so much. How are you going to do yourself justice, catching behind the bat this afternoon, if you fill yourself up with peanuts?"

"Jack," said Lafe, munching as he walked along, "if I didn't fill up on something, I'd be so weak I couldn't even catch a case of measles."

Lafe Lampton's easy optimism was just the thing Jack Lightfoot needed, and after he had walked on down to the grounds, talking with Lafe, he felt in much better spirits.

"We'll do the best we can," he said, and——"

"Angels could do no more!" declared Lafe, taking another handful of peanuts from his pocket. "You may bet your boots we're going to win out to-day, in spite of everything. If Kirtland gets funny, I'll throw a bat at him."

The Tidewater boys were already on the diamond, slamming a ball around for warming-up work.

Snodgrass was already on the grounds, close up to the diamond, seated with his aged wife in his shining buggy, holding the reins of his handsome horse.

He had bought a new silk hat for the occasion, and seemed to have purchased somewhere a brand-new smile.

The old man was actually growing young again, under the influence of the renewed interest he was taking in sports, and in the athletic young fellows of Cranford.

"Jack," he said, smiling, as Jack and Lafe came up, "I'm down here to see you lay it over Tidewater this afternoon, and I know you can do it."

"We'll do the best we——"

Snodgrass shook his bony forefinger at Jack.

"You'll do it! Say that."

"We'll do it!"

Jack had taken off his cap, and stood before the

buggy, bareheaded, his shock of dark brown hair rippled by the light wind, and his face flushed.

"I shall hold you to that, Jack," said Snodgrass.

"I never knew you yet to break your word."

A great crowd was pouring through the gates of the old fair grounds.

The small grand stand and the few rows of seats called the "bleachers" were already filled, chiefly with girls and women, among whom Jack saw Nellie Conner and Kate Strawn, the sister of Brodie Strawn.

Ned Skeen, a bit late, came up at a brisk trot.

"Howling mackerels, but we're going to have a crowd! I think the whole town is coming down. And about half of Tidewater is here already."

The Tidewater nine and substitutes had come over with their friends and rooters on a special train.

The Tidewater rooters were already gathered at one side of the diamond, back of the foul lines, and were tuning up, encouraging the practice of the Tidewater boys.

Lafe Lampton stood looking at this practice work.

"If Jack was only going into the box, I think we could win against those fellows," said Skeen.

"We're going to win, anyhow," Lafe declared.

Kirtland walked up, handsome in his new uniform.

"We'll lay those fellows out dead cold," he said, confidently. "My arm is all right again."

Jack Lightfoot was also studying the Tidewater nine. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"That pitcher they've got there doesn't belong in Tidewater, and I know it!"

All looked at the Tidewater pitcher.

"What makes you think so?" Kirtland asked.

"Because I know the regular pitcher; that fellow has been hired from somewhere to pitch in this game against us."

Jack stepped back, and, speaking to a friend in the crowd, asked him to get some points quietly on this

subject, by making inquiries among the Tidewater people.

This friend did his work well, and returned in a few minutes with his report.

"That's Kid Casey! He belongs in Tidewater, but they say he isn't eligible; at least, the fellow who told me said so. Casey has played for two years as a professional."

Jack promptly made a protest against Casey.

Yet he was ruled down.

Casey belonged in Tidewater, was one of the Tidewater substitutes, and Jack could not prove, right at that moment, that he was a professional; and, therefore, he lost his point.

"He's got great curves!" said Lampton.

"Can he control 'em?" asked Kirtland. "It seems to me he's wild. And, remember, my dear Lafayette,"—he wiggled his hand airily—"I've got a few curves myself."

He did not like anything like a suggestion that perhaps the pitcher of the visiting nine might be his superior.

He looked at Jack and Lafe, and, though his manner was outwardly cordial, deep down in his heart there was a rankle of ill feeling.

The Cranford boys were greeted with cheers, when they took their places on the diamond for a little warming up and practice work.

Wilson Crane was there, but he was not in a talkative mood, and he seemed to want to keep away from the other members of the nine. He would hardly look at Phil Kirtland.

Jack spoke to him, when he found a favorable opportunity.

"No sulking to-day, Wilson! Remember that this is your chance to show what you can do. We've all got to pull together, to win this game. Just stop thinking about Kirtland, and do the work that's cut out for you."

"I told you about him hitting me last night!" said Wilson.

"Yes; but forget it if you can. We're here to play ball, nothing else. Forget everything else."

Wilson brightened.

"I'll try, because you want me to!"

By the time the umpire was ready to call the game the old fair grounds had become a seething mass of interested spectators.

The Cranford people were, of course, in the majority; but whatever Tidewater lacked in numbers, it made up in noise. The Tidewater rooters bellowed continually, as if they thought that would "rattle" the home team.

The batting lists, as given to the umpire, were as follows, showing also the positions of the players:

CRANFORD.

Phil Kirtland, p.
Tom Lightfoot, 2b.
Brodie Strawn, 1b.
Saul Messenger, 3b.
Lafe Lampton, c.
Ned Skeen, ss.
Jubal Marlin, rf.
Wilson Crane, cf.
Jack Lightfoot, lf.

TIDEWATER.

Ben Bartlett, rf.
Talbot Brown, ss.
Kid Casey, p.
Silas Cross, 1b.
Jim Lane, c.
Paul Lockwood, lf.
Sidney Talbot, cf.
George Steele, 3b.
Mason King, 2b.

Jack Lightfoot concealed his undeniable nervousness and anxiety, and strove to give to his men the confidence he hardly felt himself.

The only one who seemed absolutely confident and satisfied was Phil Kirtland.

He was to go in the pitcher's box.

That would make him the cynosure of all eyes, put him right in the forefront, and give him an opportunity to cover himself all over with glory; and that was what he wanted.

Of course, he was satisfied.

The spectators were talking and yelling, and the rooters from Tidewater braying their discordant din.

The umpire stepped out into the field, broke open a box, and tossed to Kidd Casey a new, white ball.

The home team, having the choice, because the

game was to be played on their grounds, chose to go first to the bat.

Casey, fair-haired and ruddy, his cap off, stepped into the pitcher's position, and, stooping down, rubbed the white, new ball in the dirt, then stood up, ready to throw.

Phil Kirtland, first on the batting list, had stepped to the bat.

The spectators cheered.

"Play ball!" said the umpire.

And the game began.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GAME OPENS.

Jack Lightfoot watched Casey closely, as he wound up to deliver the ball.

It was probably a feeler, for it came in wide of the plate.

"He's professional, all right," was Jack's thought. "But what can we do?"

Casey rubbed more dirt on the ball, when Jim Lane sent it back to him, and wound up with a bigger swing.

Kirtland, confident, struck at it and missed it, as it shot downward over the plate.

"One ball, and one strike!" called the umpire.

The crowd was quieting, to watch the game.

Jack continued to watch the Tidewater pitcher, with a glance now and then at the other players, and at Kirtland.

Casey increased his speed, and sent in his next right over the plate.

Kirtland knew well enough that a swift ball should not be slashed at, the swiftness of the ball being about all that is needed to drive it out; on the other hand, a slow ball should be batted hard.

Kirtland was considered one of the safest hitters on the Cranford team, but Casey had put on so much steam that Kirtland made three fouls, and then fanned out, to his great disgust and chagrin.

The Tidewater rooters bellowed and shook out the little flags which they had brought with them for the purpose; and Kirtland, somewhat crestfallen, walked to his seat.

"That was rotten!" he said. "I ought to have done better than that!"

"I'll bet ten dollars that Tom whacks one of them things aout, in spite of that pitcher!" declared Jubal Marlin, with a grin; and, for saying that, Kirtland gave him a black look.

Tom Lightfoot stepped into the batter's place, swung at the first ball, an in-shoot, and lined it hot down to shortstop, where it was held.

"Howling mackerels!" said Skeen, nervously. "Two men out already!"

Again the Tidewater rooters bellowed and waved their little flags.

"Take a brace, you fellows!" was yelled from the Cranford side.

"We'll try to," said Brodie Strawn, grimly, as he picked up the timber.

Casey, tossing his uncapped mane of hair, put on speed again, so that the ball, as it came in, fairly burned the air.

Brodie was wary, and let it go by.

"Strike one!" called the umpire, standing behind the catcher.

The ball came in again, swiftly as before. But Brodie was a good and hard hitter.

Crack!

Brodie met it squarely, and sent it into deep center.

"Howling mackerels, a three-base hit!" yelled Skeen, springing to his feet in his excitement. "Oh, you wonder! Go it—go it!"

Brodie was "going it," as fast as he could run, while the center fielder, having let the ball pass him, was chasing it.

The Cranford people found their tongues, and such

a roar of applause went up, as Brodie tore round the bases, as had seldom been heard in those grounds.

The volume and heartiness of it fairly made Phil Kirtland writhe.

He liked Brodie Strawn, for Brodie always stood by him, but he could not help wishing he had made that hit, and was being cheered in that lavish manner.

The Cranford boys and their substitutes were frantic with joy. Brodie stopped on third, as the ball was fielded in.

"Oh, you wonder!" said Skeen, standing up and shouting. "That was a corker—that was a beauty! If I should ever hammer a ball like that, I'd die of pure happiness."

"Now, if I can bring him in!"

It was Saul Messenger who spoke, as he took up the bat.

"You can, all right," said Jack. "Their pitcher is rattled now, and you can hammer him!"

Saul Messenger thrust forward his pugilistic chin, after throwing back his shock of yellow hair, and waited for the ball.

It came—a swift in-shoot. Saul waited for balls that he thought he could get; and then fanned out on three strikes; and retired the side.

Again the Tidewater rooters broke forth, as the Cranford boys went into the field without a single score.

Phil Kirtland entered the pitcher's box, smiling and confident. He had wanted to show what he could do as a twirler, and his opportunity had come. He looked at the grand stand and the bleachers, and waved his hand airily, in his old fashion, in return for the cheers he received from his friends.

Lafe Lampton, behind the batter's plate, was adjusting pad and mask.

The Tidewater Tigers streamed in to the benches, cheery and jovial, because they had retired the Cranford side without a score.

As the first batter of the Tidewater nine came to the bat, Lampton signaled to Kirtland, and the latter sent in a corner cutter.

It was a good throw. Kirtland's friends cheered him again, and again Kirtland waved his hand airily.

"Strike one!" said the umpire.

"Do it again!" said Lafe, and once more he signaled for the kind of ball he wanted.

But they did not come in as he had signaled, and two balls were called on the pitcher.

Kirtland waved his hand airily again, then signaled, and threw an in-curve.

Ben Bartlett, the Tidewater boy at the bat, missed it.

"Strike two, and two balls!"

"That's the stuff!" said Lampton, encouragingly; for Lampton, loyal to Cranford, wanted to win the game, no matter who was in the pitcher's box, and regardless of whether he liked Kirtland or disliked him.

Kirtland tried an out-curve, and missed the plate.

"Ball three!"

The spectators craned their necks amid a buzz of excitement. The next pitched ball would settle it, so far as this batter was concerned, for there were now two strikes and three balls.

The batsman got the ball, became a base runner, and reached first.

Then he began to play off; and when Kirtland threw he made a dash for second.

Lampton held the ball and lined it hot for second; but, though Tom Lightfoot held it, he could not get it on the runner in time, and Bartlett was declared safe on a slide. But it was a very close call for him, and showed the Tidewater boys that they could not "monkey" much with Lafe Lampton.

Bartlett, overconfident now, tried another steal, and was promptly thrown out at third.

Kirtland struck out the next batter, Talbot Brown.

He did it neatly, and his friends cheered him with such fervor that his heart swelled with pride.

Then Kid Casey came to the bat.

Casey, for some reason, fanned out very promptly.

The Tidewater side was out, and two of the three had gone down under Kirtland's pitching.

"That was good work," said Jack, with honest enthusiasm.

"Yes; keep it up, and we'll win!" cried Skeen, who had applauded Kirtland vociferously.

"Just do your work as well as I do mine," said Kirtland, somewhat cuttingly; and Skeen subsided.

Lafe Lampton went to the bat, landed a ball in right field, and was thrown out at first.

"You're too lazy to run," said Skeen. "If you had run faster, you'd have got there."

He took up the timber and pranced into place.

"See Skeeny knock the eye out of the man in the moon!" some one howled.

Skeen seemed to try to, for he knocked a high fly, which Casey gathered in with great alacrity.

"Howling mackerels, out!"

"Two men air aout!" said Jube Marlin; and he came up to the plate swinging two bats, so that when he tossed one down the other would feel lighter. "Naow, give it tew me right there!"

He held up his bat and tapped it, indicating the place.

"If yeou throw it right, I'll put it over the fence, by gravy!"

"Here's an easy one!" said Casey, laughing; and because he laughed, and not because he intended to, he really did give Jubal an "easy one"; and Jube made a two-bagger, running for first and second like a hound.

"Good work!" said Jack, walking out beyond third to coach him.

Wilson Crane had come to the bat. Jack signaled

to him to try to put the ball in right field, signaling at the same time to the runner on second.

That signal from Jack Lightfoot did wonders for Wilson Crane, who, feeling that Kirtland was boring him with his sharp eyes, had felt nervous.

After a strike and a ball, in which Jubal kept leading off second, Wilson knocked out a right-field hit, and took first, while Jubal landed safely on third.

Jack Lightfoot now came, himself, to the bat, while Ned Skeen went down to third to coach Jubal, and Tom Lightfoot went to first to coach Crane.

Two men were out, and two runners on bases.

"It's up to you, old man!" said Lafe, as Jack picked up the bat.

But no one knew that better than Jack.

Casey tried him first with wide balls; then, making a change, sent one straight over, hot as a rifle bullet.

Crack!

Jack Lightfoot met it, and drove it straight through Lockwood's hands into left field.

"Go home, they can't get you!" Skeen yelled to Jubal Marlin, who was running like a rabbit for the home plate, while the man on first was sprinting for second and third, closely followed by Jack Lightfoot.

Jube Marlin came home, making the first score, and two men were on bases.

"Haw, haw!" Jube laughed, nervously and hilariously happy. "Hooray fer Jack Lightfoot!"

The Cranford people were yelling in a way to turn Kirtland green with envy.

It was now Kirtland's turn at the bat.

He swung confidently at two balls, and had two strikes called on him. Then he knocked a liner. It seemed going straight over the pitcher's head; but, with a great jump, Casey pulled it down.

Then how the Tidewater rooters roared.

CHAPTER IX.

PUNISHING THE PITCHER.

Kirtland felt sore, yet he waved his hands airily at the friends who cheered him, and walked proudly down to the pitcher's box, as the Tidewater boys streamed in, laughing, to the benches, and Lafe went behind the bat.

"Here's where we begin to hammer him!" said Jim Lane, the Tidewater captain, as Silas Cross took up his long bat.

Cross had the reputation of a hard hitter.

Kirtland, confident and smiling, began to send in wide teasers; but Cross did not reach for them. He waited until the ball came over the plate just right; and a strike and two balls were called before he swung.

Crack!

It was a beautiful daisy cutter, which Ned Skeen, at short, failed to get; but Wilson Crane, in center, had run in. Wilson sent the ball to the second as quickly as he could, and so quickly that he came near putting the runner out there.

Yet Cross had taken second, and Kirtland was furious.

"Get a move on!" he howled to Crane. "You can't throw rocks!"

Boiling with rage, he turned and threw on to the plate.

Jim Lane, the Tidewater captain, was at the bat, and Lane was a good one.

Crack!

The ball went sailing into left field.

Jack Lightfoot, playing left field, sprinted to get under it, though it seemed it must pass him; yet he accomplished it, and, with a great jump, pulled down the ball and put Lane out.

Cross, thinking he could not get it, had taken chances. Now he sprinted to get back to second. Cross was not quick enough, for the throw Jack made to Tom on second was held, though it came like a rocket,

and Tom tagged his man before he could get to the bag.

Two men were out, Cross and Lane, and the work had been done by Jack and Tom Lightfoot.

The Cranford yell rose in a thunderous outburst; and old Snodgrass, in his buggy, pounded with his cane until it seemed he would poke it through the woodwork.

Kirtland frowned. He was glad to have those two terrible batters out, but he had not shared the honor of putting them "to sleep."

Paul Lockwood, another hard hitter, came to the bat.

He was left-handed, and Kirtland did not like that, for left-handed batters always troubled him.

Lockwood got a strike; then a ball was called, and another strike; then——

Crack!

Kirtland was hammered again.

The ball went into center, and was fielded in by Crane, but it had been good for one bag.

"Get a move on you; you're slower than cold molasses!" said Kirtland to Crane.

Sidney Talbot hammered the first pitched ball, sending Lockwood to third, and taking second himself.

The Tidewater rooters were now roaring again.

Steele, the next at the bat, was not known to be a hard hitter; yet on the third pitched ball he connected.

Then pandemonium broke loose, with the base runners flying, and the crowd yelling like wild animals.

Paul Lockwood came home; Sidney Talbot came home; and Steele went to second.

The ball had gone over the heads of pitcher and shortstop, had bounded in a succession of wild jumps, and Crane had found trouble in getting it and fielding it in.

Two runs had been pulled in, and a man was on second.

The uproar had not stilled, when Lafe Lampton sig-

naled for the ball he wanted and Kirtland stood ready to throw to the plate.

The coacher of the Tidewaters was barking away, his intention being to "rattle" Kirtland quite as much as to help the base runner.

"Now! now!" he yelled, as Kirtland's arm came up. "He's no good; he's going up in a balloon; lead off—lead off! Now, now!"

Crack!

Mason King swung at the first ball, and sent it as a grass cutter to short.

Skeen jumped for it.

"Here!" yelled Saul Messenger, holding up his hands at third.

Skeen sent it to him, stopping the runner from second, who now tried to get back to second.

There was a quick game of see-saw between second and third, which ended when Tom Lightfoot tagged Steele.

Three men were laid low, and the side was out.

But the Tidewater boys had pulled in two runs, had batted Kirtland heavily, and were now one run in the lead, at the close of the second inning of the game.

In the next inning they gained two runs more. Casey proved a wizard in the box, yet Cranford was lucky enough to pull in one run.

Kirtland grew nervous, and went up in a balloon.

"My arm is hurtin' me again!" he growled. "I'm not in as good shape as I ought to be to-day, and the fellow who threw that brick and hit my arm is the one who is responsible!"

In the fourth inning, through good fielding, the runs of the Tidewaters were held down to one. Casey again did wonderful pitching, yet the Cranford boys made a run.

In the fifth, Kirtland gave a man a base on balls right off; and two men hammered him for base bits, filling the bases.

Lafe Lampton, behind the bat, groaned,

"Jiminy crickets, if Jack don't take that fellow out we're done up," was his thought.

Yet he smiled encouragingly to Kirtland, as he sent the ball to him.

The people who had so cheered Kirtland when he did good work, were now the ones who howled against him.

"Kirtland, go use Pears' Soap!"

"Pears' soap?" said Nellie Conner, speaking to Kate. "What does he mean?"

"That's a polite way he has of telling him to 'get off the earth!'"

The Cranford boys, and the Cranford people, were worried. Casey was a wizard in the box, and Kirtland was being hammered.

Kirtland threw again; and the hit brought two men home, and put a man on third and one on first.

"Tidewater is simply batting Kirtland out of the box," was now heard all round.

Even Kirtland heard those remarks, for they were not spoken quietly nor in a corner.

"It's my arm!" he said to himself. "But I can do the trick even yet."

He tried, without a word of interference from Jack; and another run was pulled in by Tidewater, before the fifth inning ended.

The score was now eight in favor of Tidewater, and Cranford had but three.

Ned Skeen was the first of the Cranfords at the bat in the beginning of the sixth inning.

"Howling mackerels, fellows, we've got to do something!" he said, shaking the bat nervously.

"See that you do something!" said Kirtland, feeling "sore" over the way the people, even his friends, had howled at him, demanding that he should be taken out of the box.

This was a lesson, though, that Kirtland needed to learn.

All baseball boys should take it to heart—and it is this:

Your friends want to see the home team, or their favorite team, win. If your play is good, and helps to make the team win, they will cheer you, and cannot say enough good things about you. But if through your poor work the team is seen to be in danger of losing, they will clamor for you to be taken out. Don't make any mistake about this.

To become a good player personal ambition must be subordinated. You are not on the team to show off, but to do work. If you play to the grand stand you make a mistake, and if, in trying to put yourself in the limelight, you are unwilling to sacrifice, you haven't the spirit that will make good team work possible; and a good team player is worth more than one who tries to advance only himself.

Phil Kirtland thought entirely of himself.

Jack Lightfoot thought chiefly of the team—the nine; he wanted the team to win, not for his personal glory, but for the glory of the team and of Cranford. And because he had that spirit, if he had been no better player than Kirtland he would have been much more valuable than Kirtland ever could be so long as the latter thought only of himself.

The sixth inning had opened; and little, nervous Ned Skeen was at the plate with the bat.

Two balls were called and two strikes, then Skeeny got one that he could hit. As luck would have it, he drove it with crashing force against the shins of Kid Casey, the Tidewater pitcher, as the latter stooped to scoop it in.

Casey did not get the ball, for that crack on the shins made him faint and sick. He hopped with pain, as he picked up the ball and tried to throw Skeen out at first, and failed.

"By hemlock, that's a good start!" said Jube Marlin, as he again came up, swinging two bats, to make

the one feel lighter when he tossed the other away and faced the pitcher.

Jube was a left-handed batter, and because of that, and for the further reason that he really had a good eye and could swing quick, he was a first-class batsman.

"You can get it!" said Jack, encouragingly.

"Haw, haw!" laughed Jube. "By gravy, I've got tew!"

Like a good many pitchers, Casey was rather afraid of a good left-handed batsman.

He feared a two-bagger; or even a three-bagger, which would bring Skeen home. And, in trying to prevent this, he gave Jube a base on balls.

Jube was now on first, and Skeen on second; and Wilson Crane came to the bat.

"Steady now," said Jack, as Wilson passed him; and Jack took his way down the base line to coach Skeen.

Jack now signaled Wilson to sacrifice.

Wilson saw the signal with a feeling of dislike, for he had the natural desire of the batsman, and wanted to lace out the ball.

But he obeyed orders, like a good team player; and while he was being thrown out at first Skeen took third and Jubal second.

Tom Lightfoot went down to coach, and Jack came to the bat, it being now his turn.

He signaled to the base runners that he meant to hit the ball out, and the coach began his chattering.

Jack did not swing until two balls and two strikes had been called, then lined a long fly into center.

Then the Tidewater people rose up and howled, while the base runners made their legs fly.

The Tidewater center fielder was racing to get under the ball, but it was plain he could do nothing of the kind.

Skeen came flying home, scoring; Jubal followed him; but the fielder having got the ball Jack was about to stop on third.

"Go home!" Tom Lightfoot yelled, seeing that the

fielder was slow and also a long distance out. "He can't get it in!"

Jack had not stopped, and he flew for home.

The ball came in to second, for the fielder could not get it to the pitcher; and the man on second lined it hot to the home plate.

Jack threw himself in a terrific slide, and touched the plate in a cloud of dust, and the ball was an instant too late.

"By hemlock, that's the stuff!" cried Jubal. "We've got a show yet!"

But Casey pulled himself together now, and struck two men out, in one, two order. They were Kirtland and Tom Lightfoot, both good men.

The side was out; but it had made three runs in the inning, and the score did not look so bad now, being six for Cranford and eight for Tidewater.

As Kirtland went into the pitcher's box a roar arose, made by people who were afraid he would give more runs to Tidewater.

He gave the runs, two of them right off, and filled the bases besides.

He was simply being batted out of the box.

His dark face was flushed and his hair was tumbled nervously.

To be roared at in that way was not to his liking.

"Take him out!" was yelled on all sides.

Jack had waited, hoping that Kirtland would have the good sense to be willing to leave the box without being ordered. But Kirtland was still doggedly determined to do something to redeem his vanishing reputation.

Jack came down to the box.

"It's my arm," Kirtland complained. "But I can do the trick yet, and I want to."

"Don't you think you'd better let me take a turn at it?" Jack asked

He spoke in such low tones that no one but Kirtland could hear what he said, in that clamor.

"They think I can't pitch, but I can!" said Kirtland. "I want to show them that I can. Just give me a chance, and don't rattle me by suggesting that I ought to leave the box. I think you must know something of how I came to have an arm that isn't just fit!"

He gave Jack a meaning, even a vicious, look.

"You don't want to come out?" said Jack.

"Give me another chance—just another chance! I can do the trick, and I know it. Give me another chance."

Jack wavered.

It was a critical time, for the bases were filled.

"All right!"

But even as Jack walked away, and Kirtland wound up to throw the ball, that clamor arose again.

"Take him out of the box!" was howled on all sides, by the Cranford sympathizers.

This was the worst thing that could have been done, so long as the captain had decided to give Kirtland a further show. However, the people were not pleased with Jack's action, and at him they were howling.

Kirtland's dark face became a brick-dust red, as he heard those shouts. His hands shook and his heart leaped in quick beats. He threw the ball, and the batter lined it out.

The runner on third came in.

Again he wound up and threw to the plate.

A daisy cutter went into right field, and the man on third came home; though the runner for first was put out.

Jack walked down to the box.

"You'll have to give it up, Kirt," he said, in a kindly tone.

He felt sorry for Kirtland, knowing how humiliated he should have been, if he had been in Kirtland's place.

"I'm sorry," he added; "but they're batting you hard, and we're going to lose the game. I'll see what I can do. You can take my place in left field."

Kirtland threw down the ball.

"I refuse to play any more!" he declared, losing his head now. "You put up that job, to injure my arm, just so this might happen—so you could lord it over me; my arm is all knocked out! It felt well enough when I began; then it went to pieces."

"Kirt," said Jack, still keeping his temper, "that's not true! I had nothing to do with injuring your arm, and know nothing about it, except what you told me; and Crane tells me he had nothing to do with it."

"Crane's a liar, and so are you!"

Jack's face flushed hotly, but he still held himself in.

Seeing that Kirtland did not intend to play left field, he sent Nat Kimball in as a substitute.

When the Cranford rooters saw that Jack was now to pitch they howled and danced in glee.

Kirtland heard them, and it made his heart more bitter than ever.

"Perhaps you think that's kind!" he said, hotly, to one of them, whom he had expected would stand by him. "My arm gave out on me; it was injured, and——"

"Then why didn't you stop; why didn't you get out of the box, if you felt you couldn't do the work?"

Kirtland walked on, without answering.

Three men were on bases, and four runs had already been made.

Jack saw that he must stop this run-getting, or his nine would have no show at all.

So he decided to use a certain curve he had been practicing, of which more will be said soon; and so successful was he, in this, his first effort with it, that he bewildered the Tidewater batters, and struck out the two men that were needed to put the side out, leaving the runners tied fast to the bases.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRUMP CURVE.

Pandemonium had broken loose again, on the Cranford side, when Jack struck out the batsmen and retired the nine from Tidewater.

Dozens of men and boys tried to get at him, to shake him by the hand and congratulate him.

"You ought to have gone into the box sooner!" they cried.

And Kirtland heard them.

Kid Casey had watched Jack's pitching.

"That fellow knows how to pitch," he whispered to himself.

Then Wizard Casey proceeded to hand in the curves that had made him a success.

There were but three innings yet to play, and the score was overwhelmingly in favor of Tidewater, being twelve to six.

Nat Kimball, who had taken Kirtland's place, and came first to bat this time, was struck out so quickly that it made his head spin.

"See if there ain't some germs on your bat!" said Skeen.

Tom Lightfoot came up, to face the wizard pitcher.

But Tom knew a thing or two.

He waited, and Casey, trying him with a slow drop, Tom landed it in the left field, high over the head of the fielder.

"Howling mackerels, it's going over the fence!" cried Skeen, springing to his feet.

It did go over the fence; and before it could be fielded in Tom Lightfoot was on third base.

Brodie Strawn followed Tom at the bat.

Casey had already discovered that Brodie was a hard man to fool; Brodie had an eye like that of a hawk, and his batting was almost as sure.

Jack ran down to third to coach Tom Lightfoot.

The wizard pitcher became nervous; and Brodie hammered a daisy cutter into center.

Tom Lightfoot came home, and Brodie took second.

Ned Skeen felt like dancing a war dance, so great was his joy.

Jack remained down on the lines to coach Brodie.

"Saul, just believe you can get it!" urged Lafe

Lampton, as Saul Messenger stepped into place at the plate.

Saul fouled; then popped up a fly, which Casey gathered in.

Then Lafe Lampton took up the timber. Two men were out, and Brodie Strawn was on second.

Jack began to coach Brodie.

The spectators were roaring again.

Jack signaled to Lafe, knowing he was a sure hitter.

The third pitched ball Lafe laced deep into right field; so deep that Brodie came home, and Lafe gained second.

Jack remained on the line, still coaching; and Ned Skeen took up the timber, as the umpire called his name.

Casey, seeing that things were going against him, put on new speed and new curves; and little Ned fanned out.

The side was out; but two runs had been brought in, bringing the total up to eight.

Jack went into the box.

Kid Casey, watching him closely, saw him put spit on the ball; and place his thumb on the spot he had thus wet.

Without saying much to anybody about it, Jack had been practicing the new ball, called the "spit ball."

When he had somewhat mastered it, he found that he could get a wonderful curve, remarkable for its sharpness and suddenness, but that the ball was not easy to control. Sometimes, when he expected the curve, it did not come, or the curve went the other way.

He determined to risk it, now, however; and he did.

The first batter who connected with it popped up a fly and went out that way; the other two men Jack struck out.

The rooters of Cranford roared. The Tidewaters seemed hardly to have come in before they were going into the field again; and they had done nothing.

"I'd give fifty dollars to know just how he did that!" was the thought of Casey, as he entered the box. "I've heard a good deal about that ball, but he's the first chap I ever saw use it. And that's queer, too, when you come to think of it; for he's not a professional. Well, he'll become one, if he keeps on in that way."

Casey knew enough not to underrate the ability of the man opposed to him. It takes some people a long time to know so much as that.

He wound up again, and began to throw his lightning curves.

"Aout, by hemlock!"

Jubal Marlin, the first man up, was struck out by the curves of the Tidewater "wizard."

But Wilson Crane had better luck. Jack had coached him with unwearying patience, until Wilson knew a good deal about batting.

He bunted a little ball down in front of the plate, and so quick was he on his long legs that he took first.

Jack Lightfoot came to the bat.

"If I can only strike him out I'll be happy!" was the thought of Casey.

But Jack connected with the first ball, and sent it so deep into right field that Crane, who could run like a prairie fire, actually came home, and Jack himself took second.

Jack stopped there, trembling for the safety of Wilson, who was risking a great slide for the plate, while the ball was whizzing to the hands of the catcher.

The dust which Wilson kicked up in that terrific slide blinded the catcher. The ball struck in his mit; then popped out.

The next instant Jack Lightfoot was springing for third.

He reached it, in a slide, as the ball came from the catcher down to the third baseman, and was slapped on Jack's shoulder.

"Judgment!" yelled the third baseman, standing up and howling at the umpire.

"Safe on third!"

The rooters of Cranford screamed again, in their joy.

Kimball took up the bat and trotted out to the plate.

"Now, see me!" he said, trying to laugh. "Here goes to put it over the fence."

Kimball didn't do that; but he whacked a grass cutter that brought Jack home.

Somehow Wizard Casey seemed to have left his magic at home.

The shortstop threw to put Jack out at the plate, and let Kimball take first.

Tom Lightfoot came to the bat, amid the roars of the enthusiastic rooters.

Old Snodgrass had forgotten his age and was chirping like a boy, while he pounded his buggy with his cane.

Casey put on speed, and Tom had two strikes called; then he swung just right, and sent a boulder along the ground past the pitcher.

The shortstop garnered it, and threw Kimball out at second; but Tom had taken first.

Two men were out—Marlin and Kimball; two runs had been made; and Tom Lightfoot was on first.

Then the heavy batter, Brodie Strawn, took up the wagon tongue; and hammered one into deep center, on the fourth pitched ball, sending Tom to third, while he took second himself.

Things were brightening for the Cranford nine. Kirtland's inharmonious selfishness had been eliminated, and the nine were working as a unit to win.

Saul Messenger had two strikes, and seemed about to fan out, with those runners on the bases.

Tom was getting desperate on third, and was on the point of risking almost anything in an effort to go home.

Then Saul caught one of Casey's curves just right, knocked a grass cutter down to short and leaped for first.

The shortstop threw to the plate to eliminate Tom, but in his excitement and haste overthrew.

The catcher leaped and cuffed the ball down, but could not get it on Tom; and then, dropping it, chased it about his feet.

The yells were a wild roar as Brodie Strawn crossed the plate, and was called safe by the umpire.

Saul Messenger had gone to second.

Lampton was a good, hard hitter, and he tried now to pull Saul Messenger across the plate.

In his attempt though, after missing two of those sharp curves and getting strikes called, he popped a fly; and went out, for the ball came down in the hands of Casey.

In the pitcher's box again, Jack tried the spit ball.

He struck out two men with it, then lost control and a run was made. But it was the only run-getting of the Tidewaters in that inning, for Jack struck out the next man.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE NINTH.

The ninth inning opened in a furore of excitement, with Ned Skeen at the bat.

The score was now—Tidewater, 13; Cranford, 12.

Small wonder, therefore, that the excitement was at fever heat. From despondency, the Cranford sympathizers had swung to hope, and were beginning to think that in the first game of the season the Cranford nine might yet win.

Skeen was quick and lively on his feet, could throw a ball like lightning, and was therefore a good shortstop, but he did not shine as a batter, especially when such a pitcher as Kid Casey was doing the pitching.

Skeen made a gallant effort to get one of Casey's terrible curves, but failed, and fanned out.

Jube Marlin again came up, lugging two bats.

"Give it tew me right there," he said, as once before, tapping the bat with his right hand.

He had his right side toward the pitcher, for he batted left-handed, and there was a grin on his homely face.

Casey remembered how, through laughing, he had really given Jube an "easy" one, which Jube had accepted.

He didn't intend to do that again; nevertheless, he called:

"Here she is!"

It was an air burner; and Jube's bat threshed helplessly through the atmosphere.

"I've got holes in my bat," he said, grinning again, "and yeou found one of 'em; see if you can't do better this time."

Again he tapped his bat.

Casey threw a corner-cutter, and Jube fanned again.

Then Jube let two balls go by, for they did not suit him.

"An easy one, mind ye!" he begged.

Casey could hardly help laughing, and his state of hilariousness took something out of the kink of the sharp curve he threw next time; and Jube got that ball.

Crack!

Jube did not seem to bat it hard; but so great was the speed of the ball that it flew into right field, threshing and bobbing over the ground at a wild rate.

Jube took first; and stood there, cackling and bragging of his performance.

"Naow one of yeou fellers bring me in!" he cried.

Wilson Crane took up the bat.

"Steady, Wilson!" said Jack to him, while Tom went down to first to coach Jubal.

Casey wound up with a terrific twist and sent in a corner-cutter.

Wilson let it go by.

Kirtland was no longer sitting in the benches boring him with those sharp eyes, and Wilson felt more at ease. Yet he appreciated to the full his responsibility.

Wilson let two balls go by; while Jubal, coached by Tom Lightfoot, played on and off first, watched by catcher and pitcher.

Then Wilson got a grass cutter out into left field.

Jack Lightfoot came to the bat, with Jubal on second and Wilson Crane on first.

Casey was nervous. If the marvelous Casey could but coax Jack to strike out, he knew the game was as good as won; but Lightfoot faced him grimly, now full of confidence.

Jack was cautious, for so much seemed to depend just then on his batting ability. He did not intend to strike at the first ball that came in; but it suited him, and he hammered it over the head of the shortstop, and jumped for first bag.

Striking the ground beyond the shortstop, the ball continued on in a series of great bounds; and the fielders who had run toward it confused each other; so that three bases were now filled—Jubal on third, Crane on second and Jack on first.

"Gee!" said Kimball, as he went to the batter's plate. "It's up to me now!"

He looked at the bat; then took out his white handkerchief and carefully polished the handle.

"What kind of a hoodoo is that?" the catcher asked.

"Germs!" said Kimball. "They're everywhere."

He did not explain further, that he was mortally afraid of germs, and was sure that the soil was full of them, and contaminated everything it touched; but he felt better, having disposed of possible germs; and now faced Casey, rather cool for little Kimball.

"Gnat, lace it out!" said Skeen. "You can do it!"

Kimball fanned, when Casey threw.

He fanned again, when another and a different curve was fed to him.

"Now he goes out!" said Casey, smiling.

But Kimball did not go out; the overconfident wizard threw a drop, and Kimball had always boasted that he could "eat drops."

He got that drop and sent it to short, who let it get through his fingers.

Jubal made a dash for the home plate.

Once more the shortstop threw high, so high that the catcher couldn't handle it, and Jubal came in on a slide, plowing up the dust.

The catcher, seeing that Jubal was safe, slammed the ball to third, in an effort to catch Wilson Crane; but Wilson, running like the wind, was also safe; and Jack had taken second.

The bases were again filled.

Tom Lightfoot came to the bat, and with a ball down to right he brought Wilson Crane home.

Saul Messenger tried to equal this performance and bring Jack Lightfoot in; and to the surprise of himself, he succeeded.

It began to seem that the wizard was being batted out of the box.

But the run-getting stopped right there, for Casey struck the next man out.

The score stood—Cranford, fifteen; Tidewater, thirteen, when Tidewater went to the bat, and Jack Lightfoot went into the pitcher's box.

"Confidence!" Jack was whispering to himself. "I must control the ball now and strike those fellows out."

He struck out one; then he lost control, and a man secured first bag.

The spit ball was uncertain of control; and Jack now filled two bases, and let one man come home.

Then he found himself, regained his control, and struck out two men, retiring the side.

But up to the last moment almost, the game seemed very uncertain.

And the score was close:

Cranford, 15; Tidewater, 14.

Not a closely played game, certainly not such a game as the league teams put up; but with the exception of Casey, not one of the players was a professional, and some of them had not been doing even fair work for any great length of time.

Yet Jack had begun to show what he could do; and his nine had, likewise, begun to prove that they had in them the making of great baseball material.

And Jack was satisfied.

Was Cranford?

If you could have heard the roaring applause with which the finish of that exciting game was greeted by the Cranford people you would know how pleased they were.

"Lightfoot," said Casey, stepping up to Jack, when the game was over, "I'll give you fifty dollars, if you'll show me how to throw that spit ball. I saw you use it; and though it got away from you at times, I could see you had it. Fifty good plunks to you, if you teach me the trick."

"Go learn it as I did," said Jack, smiling. "I think it's worth more than fifty good plunks to me."

"Well, that curve you got now and then was certainly the trump," said Casey. "I tried to see how you did it, and I'm going to practice for that curve myself."

"Just a word," said Jack, still smiling. "You're a professional, Casey, and I know it, though I couldn't prove it."

Casey laughed.

"Am I?" he said, lifting his eyebrows. "Prove it!"

"If you'll admit that you're a professional, I might think of teaching you how to throw that spit ball!"

Casey laughed again.

"And that would put me out of biz here, so that the spit ball, and every other kind of ball, wouldn't do me any good. See anything green there?" He lifted an eyelid. "Oh, no, I'm not a professional; I never even saw a professional game played! Ta, ta, Lightfoot! You're bright as a dollar, but I rather think I know a thing or two. Well, good-by; that curve of yours was a trump!"

And he walked away singing:

"Casey at the bat!"

Going on uptown after the game, and turning homeward, Jack came suddenly on a sight that filled him with hot indignation.

Phil Kirtland had been to Jack's home, intending to have some words with him. Coming out, he had met, at the alley crossing, no other than Wilson Crane, who also was going to Jack's for a bit of conversation.

The sight of Wilson Crane there threw Kirtland into a rage.

"Wilson," he said, "I never go behind anybody's back to say anything or do anything; whatever I do I come out in the open!"

Wilson recoiled from him and tried to pass on.

"Yet *you* don't!" Kirtland flung at him. "You play the sneak! You have the cowardice of a thug. I had to leave that box to-day, or rather Jack Lightfoot pulled me out of it! And why? Simply because you threw that brickbat the other evening, right near here, and knocked my arm out."

"I didn't," said Wilson, sturdily.

"You're a liar! If you didn't, you know who did, and was in with him."

"I don't know anything about it," said Wilson, still trying to retreat.

Kirtland followed him up, boiling with rage and chagrin.

"And because of that I had to suffer the humiliation of being taken out of the box!" he cried.

"Why didn't you go out of it, instead of waiting to be put out, when your arm went back on you?" said Wilson, angrily. "That's what you should have done."

"You'd insult me, on top of that other, would you?"

With this, he struck Wilson, knocking him up against the paling fence.

Jack Lightfoot's footsteps were heard.

He did not catch the words, but he saw the blow. A few bounds took him to Kirtland's side.

"That was mean—that was cowardly!" he cried. Kirtland turned on him.

"You'd take it up, would you?"

"Strike him again, and I strike you, Kirtland!"

"You'd take it up, would you? You're as bad as he

is, and know as much about that as he does! And you'll take that!"

He sprang for Jack's face, leading with his right.

Jack knocked the blow aside, and the next moment Philip Kirtland measured his full length on the walk, knocked flat by Jack Lightfoot.

He sprang up and rushed at Jack; and again he went down.

"My arm's out of gear to-day," he said, panting as he rose now. "You're a better man than I am to-day, Jack Lightfoot, because of that. But this arm will get well, and be all right again; and, as soon as it does, I'll settle you!"

"Any time!" said Jack. "I've wanted to have you for my friend; but if it pleases you better to be my foe, have it that way. We'll walk on to the house, Wilson."

Kirtland stood glaring at them, as they passed through the gate.

He looked all about. Apparently no one other than Wilson had seen his humiliation. He brushed the dust from his clothing, flicking it away with his handkerchief; then he passed up the street.

"All right, Jack Lightfoot; I think I'd rather be your foe than your friend! And if neither you nor Wilson Crane threw the brick that did the job for my arm, who did?"

The job had been done by Bat Arnold, accompanied by Nick Flint; though Kirtland was not to know that for some time. Bat had wanted to be on the regular nine, and might have been there but for Kirtland. And that was Bat's way to get even.

THE END.

Next week we are to have another capital baseball story. It is No. 7, and is entitled "Jack Lightfoot's Crack Nine; or, How Old 'Wagon Tongue' Won the Game." You will find some lively baseball work in this story, and you will enjoy it. Are you practicing these days on the diamond? In many parts of the country, where the weather permits, the boys are getting themselves in shape for the baseball season, now at hand. If you like a good baseball story get the next number of the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY.

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